THE EXCEPTIONAL CHILD IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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THE EXCEPTIONAL CHILD IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

BY

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GREENSBORO, N. C.

AS
36
N65
Ed
29-2

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

EDUCATION

NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

JUNE, 1929

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her gratitude and appreciation to those whose direction and guidance have made possible the completion of this investigation.

To my adviser, Dr. A.P.Kephart, of the School of Education, North Carolina College for Women, Greensboro, N.C., for valuable suggestions and constructive criticism throughout the progress of this study.

To Superintendents, Principals and Supervisors of the Schools of North Carolina for their willing cooperation in my undertaking.

To my Committee, Professors John H. Cook, Dean of the School of Education, and Dr. W.S.Barney, Chairman of the Graduate Committee, of the North Carolina College for Women, Greensboro, N.C., for suggestions and sympathetic encouragement.

February 1929 Daisy Jane Cuthbertson.

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The Exceptional Child in the Elementary Schools of North Carolina

The purpose of this study is to find out what has been done in North Carolina for the exceptional child and to make helpful suggestions.

The Exceptional Child and Tests.

Herbert Hoover once said, "Our responsibility for children is based not alone on human aspirations, but also upon the necessity to secure physical, mental and moral health and the economic and social progress of the nation. Every child that is delinquent in body, education, or character is a charge upon the whole community, as a whole, and a menace to the community itself. The children are the army with which we march to progress."

Children whose school progress is puzzling, whose personalities manifest traits that give cause for concern, are to be found in every school. Whatever the type of difficulty, the past few years have seen a very significant change in the attitude toward the many problems of childhood. Often it is found that the problems are due to unsuspected factors for which the home, the school, or neighborhood influences, rather than the child himself, are responsible.

Mental tests have been developed for the purpose of measuring "general intelligence".

Psychological authorities are not unanimous upon the technical interpretation of the term "general intelligence"; but all agree that it should designate the inborn capacity to adapt one's self to new situations in life. This is very closely related to the ability to learn. Binet says, "It seems to us that there is a fundamental faculty, the alteration or the lack of which is of the utmost importance for practical life. This faculty is judgment, otherwise called good sense, practical sense, initiative, the faculty of adapting one's self to circumstances. To judge well, to comprehend well, to reason well, --these are the essential activities of intelligence."

Those who are most familiar with the use of tests are usually conscious of their limitations, and it is only as such limitations are recognized and understood that the greatest value of the tests will be realized.

1. The mental test does not enable us to stamp the child once for all as ranking exactly thus or so in brightness.
2. The mental test is not a measure of what the child has accomplished in his school work, but what he is able to accomplish under favorable conditions.
3. The mental test is not a test of special talents or abilities.
4. The mental test is not the means to discover the vocation for which a child is best suited.

5. The mental test is not the sole criterion to be used in the classification of children in school.

There are two types of mental tests available for the measurement of general intelligence; individual tests and group tests. An individual test can be given to but one person at a time; a group test can be given to an entire class together.

The result of an individual test is expressed in terms of mental age (M.A.) and intelligence quotient (I.Q), while that of a group test takes the form of a score of the total number of points earned. This score can be translated into school grade or mental age equivalent.

The best known of the individual tests is the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Test.

Such intelligence tests have demonstrated the great extent of individual differences, which must be considered in the framing of curricula and methods, in the classification of children for instruction, and in their educational and vocational guidance.

The present grading system in the schools arose from the recognition of the fact that classification of the pupils according to ability promotes economy and efficiency.

School administrative practice in the United States has set up grade standards of achievement which, notwithstanding a certain amount of variability intentionally allowed for, are supposed to represent a fair degree of

uniformity throughout the country, or at least throughout the schools of a given city, state or county. The standardized achievement tests have shown that such uniformity does not exist. Intelligence tests have shown that his condition is really due to differences in raw material with which different schools have to work.

The Exceptional Child.

The mental or intelligence test is only one factor in determining the proper adjustment of the child. The result of the test may point in one direction; the teacher's judgment may indicate another course of action; the child's physical and social history may suggest another line. All must be considered in answering the question, "What is best for this individual child?" Only when that question is answered carefully, conscientiously, and sympathetically, in view of the needs of the child and of the possibilities for adjustment that are at hand, can a mental testing program be said to function properly in a school system.

Terman says, "Ideally, provision should be made for five groups of children: the very superior, the superior, the average, the inferior, and the very inferior." We may refer to these as classes for the "gifted", "bright", "average", "slow", and "special" pupils. For each of these groups there should be a separate track and a specialized curriculum. In general, the percentage who should be cared for in the various groups would range somewhat as follows:

Gifted, 1 to 3 percent.

Bright, 10 to 20 percent.

Average, 54 to 78 percent.

Slow, 10 to 20 percent.

Special, 1 to 3 percent.

For these varying groups, the working out of a differentiated course of study, as regards content and method, is one of the urgent needs in education today. It is easy enough to say that courses for the "bright" and "gifted" should be "enriched" and that those for the slow pupils should be reduced to "minimum essentials". Just what kind of enrichment is most desirable for the former, and what minimum essentials are for the latter, are questions which cannot be answered satisfactorily today.

For the bright, average, and slow groups, the reorganization should hinge primarily upon differentiated curriculum content and methods rather than time adjustments. The large majority of these should complete their work in the same number of years.

We wish to make a study of provisions for the "gifted" and the "special" groups whom we term exceptional.

The problem of retardation has received much attention, because backwardness in school becomes such a vital matter. When is a child retarded? Every child who begins school at the legal age of six years and is promoted regularly with its class is normal; every child who is two or more years

behind the grade it should be in for its age is retarded or backward.

Backward children may be divided into two classes: those temporarily backward and those permanently backward. The first includes all those children retarded on account of removable defects, the second includes all that growing army of unfortunate children whose defects are deeply seated within their very being beyond the present philosophy of man to understand.

Professor Thorndike undertook experiments with groups of school children of high and of low initial ability to determine whether equal opportunity or equal special training would produce an equalizing effect in easily alterable traits such as rapidity in addition. Without exception he found at the end of such experiments, although both groups had improved, the superior individuals were farther ahead than ever; that equality of opportunity and training had widened rather than narrowed the gap between the two classes.

It is an established fact that not far from two per-cent of the children enrolled in our schools have a grade of intelligence which will never develop beyond the level that is normal for the child of eleven or twelve years. In order to reach that level, such children need special instruction, and some school systems include classes to which are sent those pupils not capable of learning through the

methods used in the training of normal children.

Since the need for better classification in the first grade is so serious, and since the mental test has proved so helpful in classification according to ability, we conclude that the place to begin testing for classification is at school entrance, before the slow and backward children have an opportunity to become discouraged.

More than 50 percent of the failures in the grades is attributed to the fact that the child is asked to do work beyond its capacity. It has been the experience of teachers in charge of special limited classes, where pupils of similar mental ability are grouped together, that these pupils behave better, work better, and accomplish more than they did under the former classification with regular grade pupils.

Schools for backward children ordinarily do not draw from classes below the third grade, or until the child has been in school three years. By this time the dull or backward child is almost a lost cause.

The Royal Commission of the Royal College of Physicians of London gives us three degrees of mental defect--idiocy, imbecility, and feeblemindedness.

1. The feeble-minded person, the highest of these three grades, is defined as "one who is capable of

earning a living under favorable circumstances, but is incapable, from mental defect existing from birth, or from early age (a) of competing on equal terms with his normal fellows, (b) or managing himself and his affairs with ordinary prudence."

2. The imbecile is defined as "incapable of earning his own living, but able to guard himself against common physical dangers."
3. The idiot is defined as "unable to guard himself against common physical dangers."

The feeble-minded children are incapable of receiving proper benefit from the instruction in the ordinary public elementary schools, but are capable of receiving benefit in special classes.

The committee on classification of the American Association for the study of the feeble-minded applied the term of feeble-minded to all degrees of mental defect, and divided the feeble-minded into three classes.

1. "Idiots: Those so deeply defective that their mental development does not exceed that of a normal child of about two years."
2. "Imbeciles: those whose mental development does not exceed that of a normal child of about seven years."

3. "Morons: Those whose mental development is above that of an imbecile but does not exceed that of a child of about twelve years." The moron signifies a person conspicuously lacking in judgment and good sense.

The questionnaire which follows was sent out to all City Superintendents and Rural School Supervisors in North Carolina. An examination of those which were returned revealed that there are twelve school systems having special or ungraded classes for backward children. These are: Asheville, Burlington, Charlotte, Durham, Goldsboro, Gastonia, High Point, Lexington, Raleigh, Roanoke Rapids, Salisbury, and Winston Salem. Eighteen additional schools divide their grades into sections according to mental tests.

We find that the only provisions made for the specially gifted child are to place him in the highest section of the grade, or to allow him to skip from one half to a year's work. In a few instances the work is so arranged as to allow these gifted children to do three years work in two years.

In order that pertinent information may be gathered you are requested to answer the following questions and return this sheet to Miss Daisy Cuthbertson, 15 Ransom Place, Charlotte, N.C.

Questionnaire.

1. Does your school make provisions for exceptional children?

2. Do you have special classes for:
   a. Very superior or gifted children?
   b. Very inferior or backward children?
   c. Defective children?
   d. How many years have you been making this special provision for exceptional children?

3. How are pupils selected for special classes?

4. What equipment have you for special classes?

5. How many pupils do you have per teacher for the special classes?

6. Do you have teachers trained for special class work?

7. Where was that training secured?

8. What are the specific objectives of your work with exceptional children?

9. What is your basis of classification of pupils in general?

10. Do you give group intelligence tests?
    a. What kind?
    b. How often?
    c. What grades?

11. Do you give individual intelligence tests?
    a. When are they given?
    b. What kind?
    c. In what grades?

12. Do you give achievement tests?
    a. What kind?
    b. How often?
    c. In what grades?

13. By whom are these tests given?

14. Are children given physical examinations?
    a. By whom?
    b. How often?

15. What is the percentage of retardation in your school?

16. What is the percentage of underage by grades?

17. What is the percentage of overage by grades?

18. Do you have mid-year promotions?

The returns from this questionnaire are listed below.

TABLES

Number schools replying to questionnaire	56
Number schools making some provision for exception-children--A, B, and C sections.	31
Number schools having special classes.	12
How long has North Carolina had special classes?	8 years
Size of special classes in North Carolina.	15 to 25
Number of schools giving group intelligence tests.	29
Number of schools giving individual intelligence tests.	24
Number of schools giving achievement tests.	31
Number of schools having mid-year promotions.	14
Number of schools having physical examinations.	33

Number of schools having trained teachers for special classes. 6

Where was this training secured:
Vineland, N.J.
Columbia University.
Peabody, Nashville, Tenn.
University of Pennsylvania.
Dr.Davenports' School of Eugenics, Cold Springs Harbor, N.Y.

Methods of selecting cases:

(a) Teacher's judgment.

(b) Achievement test.

(c) Principal's approval.

(d) Stanford or Herring Revision of Benet-Simon individual test.

Nature of equipment in North Carolina.

Tables and chairs.

Looms, wood-working tools.

Basketry, sewing, cooking, painting easels, victrolas, orchestra.

Special grade library, form boards.

Silent reading material, number cards.

Crayons, clay, scissors, bulletin boards, games and puzzles.

Conclusions and Discussions.

The gifted child is perhaps the most neglected of any of our children. Special classes for these children are of very great importance, for the reason that these children are likely to be leaders in society, and therefore should have a more advanced training than those who can be trained merely for self-support.

Thus far there seem to be no special classes in North Carolina for gifted children. In the schools having special classes, these seem to be planned almost entirely for the backward children. In a few instances, we find restorative classes, which help the children to get ready to return to the regular grades.

Special classes have been in operation in North Carolina for about eight years. Some little attention was given to this kind of work in the regular grades for several years before these classes were started.

In the schools which have special classes, the children entering first grade are given the Detroit first grade intelligence group test, or the Pintner-Cunningham group test, for classification into the fast, average and slow sections. When a child becomes a misfit in these classes he is given achievement tests. If these, with the judgment of the teacher and the principal, show that

he is in need of special attention, then he is given the individual intelligence test, usually the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon test. If this test shows that he is greatly retarded, he is placed in a special class. He is given a very thorough physical examination and the defects found are remedied, whenever possible. His family history and home conditions are studied, in an effort to know the child better, and thus be of greater help to him.

The classrooms for these special classes vary as to their equipment. Some have almost none, others have tables, chairs, easels, form-boards, looms, saws, hammers and other shop equipment, home-making equipment, special room library, basketry, sewing, cooking, painting, weaving, clay, printing press, silent-reading material, number cards, piano, victrolas, orchestral instruments, games and puzzles.

The sizesof these classes in North Carolina vary from ten to twenty-five, but in most cases the ideal number is considered fifteen. This is about as many backward or defective children as can be handled in one classroom by one teacher.

Teachers selected for this work are those who are interested in it and who have had several years of successful teaching experience, and some special training. Some

of the teachers in this work have been trained at Vineland, N.J.; Peabody College, Nashville, Tenn.; Columbia University, New York City; Notra Dame, Md.; University of New York, New York City; University of Penn., Philadelphia, Pa.; and Dr.Davenport's School of Eugenics, Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y.

The outlook for special class work in North Carolina is bright, for many of our superintendents and teachers are interested and are seeing the need. Almost every year new classes are added.

Teachers are preparing themselves for this special work and within a few years it should be possible for all children needing individual instruction, to have it provided for them in their own schools.

When the school can provide a trained psychologist for testing and classifying, and specially trained teachers for this work we may expect better and more worthwhile results.

In the schools of North Carolina and elsewhere the policy seems to be to keep the child in the slow section of a regular grade for two years or more. Then, if the child is unable to do the work of the regular grade, he is given the Binet-Simon Test, usually the Stanford Revision, and a more thorough physical examination. If the results of these agree with the judgment of the teacher,

the child is then placed in the special class.

Most of the first grade children are given a group intelligence test when they enter school, and are classified into fast, average, and slow groups. A child whose mental age ranges below six, is not sufficiently developed mentally to undertake first grade work. He shouls be given a physical examination at once, and all physical defects remied as soon as possible. If this child could be placed in a pre-primary or pre-reading group and kept there until he is six years old mentally, he would be happier and we would have fewer failures. This pre-primary grade should combine some kindergarten and primary principles, and should help each child to learn to live with other people.

The report which follows indicates what is being done in one city in the state and may be helpful to others who need such information.

Special Classes in the Charlotte Schools.

The need for special or ungraded classes in the Charlotte City Schools caused them to be formed. The grade teachers realized that there was something worthwhile latent in every school child, and that this child must be assisted in bringing this talent into service. The work in these classes is fitted to the needs of the child. Perfect freedom is allowed each pupil. If he prefers to work standing, he stands. The children found in these classes are the misfits of the regular grades. They are the children most commonly misunderstood in the school because they cannot do history, geography, English, or some other regular grade study well enough to pass them in a regular grade examination.

In the special classes they are given the opportunity to do the things they like best and are most suited to do. They are given as much academic work as they are capable of doing, but their best work is found in the field of mechanical and industrial efforts.

The rooms selected for these classes are bright and cheerful, and are equipped with tables and chairs. Tools of various kinds are found to occupy and develop energies, otherwise often misspent. Other equipment consists of easels for painting, looms, form-boards, printing-press,

special room library, basketry, clay, sewing materials, cooking, silent reading material, number work cards, victrolas, orchestral instruments, games and puzzles.

In this system there are now fourteen special classes for the educationally handicapped children for whites and one for colored.

There are three types included:

1. Orthogenic Backward: For children mentally or educationally handicapped to such an extent as to render doubtful their ability to progress in regular grades.
2. Orthogenic Disciplinary: For children presenting serious behavior problems who cannot conform socially in regular classes.
3. Orthogenic Restoration: For children who are educationally retarded, but who may, under special instruction, be expected to return to regular classes. The children in this class are of normal capacity, but because of illness, a late start in school, language difficulty, or some other circumstances, are seriously retarded in their school work.

An average attendance of eighteen is required in these classes.

Admission of a child to these classes is made on the recommendation of the teacher and the principal following achievement tests. Next, he is given the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon tests. If this shows that he should be put in the special class, he is placed there.

The academic work offered in these classes consists usually of reading, writing, spelling, language and number work,---all of these dealt out according to the needs of the individual pupil.

The aim is to train the child to live a full and happy life and to fit him to take his place in society and show himself the best citizen of which he is capable.

Case Studies.

Case number one: Mental age nine. Chronological age fifteen, one of four children who are boys.

Entered first grade at age of seven years and spent two years in each of the first four grades. Aenemic. Has no appetite. He is not at all dependable. Can not do brain work, but works fairly well with his hands and likes to draw, which is his best work. Conduct and work very poor.

After leaving school drifted from one job to another, but just before he was twenty went to consult his former teacher about joining the navy. She advised him to join at once. This he did and reports that he is enjoying life in the navy.

Case number two:

Entered first grade at the age of seven years. Seems to have done good work in first grade but spent two years each in grades two and three, and three years in grade four. This boy spent two years in the Ungarded or Special Class and could read and write with only third grade ability when he dropped out of school. When he entered this grade he did not know how to play a fair game, but after intensive training his improvement was such that his teacher said o' him, "quick tempered, but honest and upright in his dealings".

This boy is now a grown man, has held a flagman's job for four years, giving perfect satisfaction. He is loud in his praises of what the special class has done for him.

Case number three:

Girl entered first grade at age of six years, repeated in grades one, three and four. Remained in special or ungraded class for two years. When she reached the age of fourteen years, her mother took her out of school and put her to work in a film exchange where she earned promotions and has held the job for several years. She had an almost ungovernable temper which she learned to control fairly well while she was in the special class.

She works well with her hands and is a handy little house-mother. She has now been married more than a year, but continues to hold her job and does light housekeeping.

Case number four:

This boy entered the ungraded or special class on account of inability to conform to school rules. The outlook for him at first seemed very unfavorable. His extreme fluctuations of attention, amounting many times to an apparent unconsciousness, his inability in any kind of independent reasoning; his lack of self-reliance, his poor retentiveness, all combined, made a somewhat gloomy picture. He remained in this class for three years and improved

wonderfully. After this he was returned to the regular grades, and has made his grade for three successive years.

Case number five:

Entered first grade at age of five years. Mental age ten, chronological age eleven. Never repeated a grade until the fifth. Work in school medium, lacking in application. Entered this class because of slowness in reading. He worked very slowly in whatever work he did. After one year in this class in sixth grade, he attended Junior High and completed this work. He had to take this work slowly on account of trouble with his eyes.

Case number six:

This boy entered school at the age of six years, and did not repeat any grades. He was referred to this class because of disciplinary traits. He was unable to get along with his work and to adjust himself to the teachers' plans. He was rather silent but anxious to please and eager for popularity. His feelings were easily hurt and a rebuke threw him into an emotional state expressed by violent weeping, if he could get a hiding place. A word of commendation usually restored his customary good spirits. He was decidedly lacking in executive ability. He was allowed to re-enter the regular grades after six months in the special class and is doing well.

Case number seven:

This boy was placed in the special or ungraded class because of "overageness" for the fifth grade. He did not mix well with the boys of his group but held himself aloof from them. He had a pleasing personality and personal attractiveness rather unusual. A frank, winning smile, calm, composed, selfsufficient--made a person feel that he was more capable than he was, when put to the test.

Entered first grade at the age of six, spent three years in this grade. Seems to have moved on slowly in the other grades. His response is slow in everything, especially lacking in initiative, alertness, comprehension and planning. He reads passably well, but has no retnetion. Therefore he gets nothing out of reading.

Judging from tests given him, he reached his minimum growth in mentality at about eight years, and since that time has been becoming more and more retarded. When he could no longer benefit by staying in school, he was advised to go to work regularly at a shop where he had been working after school hours. His teacher asked him to report to her each week as to how he was getting along. He did this for nineteen out of twenty-three weeks.

He got into the wrong company, was found guilty of housebreaking. He was sentenced to an indefinite term at Jackson Training School, but remained only one year. The

superintendent said, "he was a model fellow and had sufficient training before going there to keep him striaght". He was paroled on good behavior more than two years ago, and has been working for the same company ever since. His father died a short time ago and he seemed to realize something of his responsibility. He said, "I am going to go straight and help my mother educate my younger brothers".

Recommendations.

Teachers of special classes should get all possible technical training for this line of work. Experience is very necessary, but this should be followed by special courses in the field of child study, genetic psychology, psychology of the abnormal child, and mental testing. Teachers also need special training in methods and teaching devices, in manual arts, simple industrial activities, and in discipline.

A special class teacher needs, in addition to those personal qualities desirable in any teacher, sympathy, understanding, patience, faith, and equanimity. She needs special social qualities, because she must meet the parents both at school and at home; she must receive visitors, since a good special class is the pride of a progressive school system, and she must maintain those contacts with her professional colleagues which are necessary to a continuance and expansion of the work.

The teacher needs to be impressed that it is her job to prove to the public that the special class fills a need in all schools. She must also know that it is her task to teach that child all the academic work he is capable of using, supplementing it with handwork.

Health education must be given an important place in helping to make the child a self-supporting citizen. This

should be a vitally interesting part of each day's work, and should be stressed in games and projects. It should include health inspection, classroom weighing, chest expansion measurements, posture work, physical education, the elementary hygiene of eating, bathing, care of the eyes and of the teeth, safety-first work, a few simple facts in first aid, and some work in home-making and care of the children.

Mentally retarded children should be trained in a variety of worthwhile ways of using leisure time, both outdoors and indoors. The teacher should be able to teach these children to appreciate the music of the great masters, to know and recognize great pictures and pieces of statuary, and to enjoy the world's best literature and plays.

The school should employ a trained psychologist to test all the children and thus select all needing to be in special classes.

The teacher should seek to find out the causes of the backwardness of her children by questions covering:

(1) Pedagogical history.

(2) Life history, giving an account of social capacities, such as work and play, individual capacities; such as self-help, moral character, diseases, past and present, infancy and birth-conditions.

(3) Family history, dwelling on the mental diseases of parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

The backward child should be taught:

(1) Citizenship.

(2) Language.

(3) Health Education and Physical Training.

(4) Music.

(5) Nature Study.

(6) Hand Work.

(7) Social Studies.

(8) Sewing and Cooking.

(9) Housekeeping.

(10) Pre-Primer work for those who are ready for it.

(11) Reading, as much as they are capable of doing.

(12) Arithmetic--counting and combinations, addition and subtraction, weights and measures.

In regard to the gifted child in special classes, he should be given the opportunity to work to the maximum of his capacity, to develop habits of industry and mental alertness, and to make the most of his abilities and talents. These classes should give the child an opportunity

for all forms of creative work--the writing of plays, stories, and poems. They should develop in him a scientific attitude toward his own progress and a scientific method of attacking problems.

These classes should save time for the child and should give definite training in leadership through the voluntary assumption, on the part of the child, of responsibility for the successful culmination of school projects, and thus help him to take his place as a leader in society.

Some advantages in placing children in special classes are:

1. If placed early they are saved from wasting time.
2. As little children they enlist the sympathy and affection of the teachers of the deaprtment more readily than when they are older.
3. Early assignment to special classes is a protection of the child's disposition.
4. They are placed with children working at about their own level.
5. They do not get so discouraged as in a regular grade.
6. They get the satisfaction of a job well done.

7. They are given a chance to develop any talent they may have.
8. Special classes should eliminate the repeaters in the grades, and thus save money for the school board, though this is insignificant as compared to doing the best thing for the child.

"The schools of a democracy are organized to provide an opportunity for indivicual growth and development to the end that each may live a happy and productive life."

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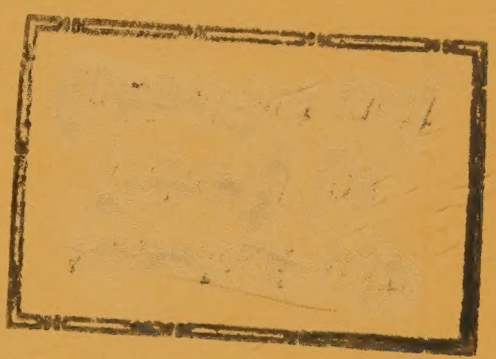

Nov '31